M-K Development Opposed By Cranston

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WASHINGTON — Sen. Alan Cranston, stating for the first time his opposition to development of Mineral King by Walt Disney Productions, has called for including the area in the national park system.

Cranston Wednesday introduced a bill to transfer jurisdiction of Mineral King from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of Interior with provisions for possibly scaled-down recreation facilities.

Mineral King, which is 65 miles east of Visalia in the Sierra Nevada, has been the focus of a bitter fight between environmentalists and pro-development forces almost from the day in 1965 when Walt Disney was selected to build an all-year recreational area, including a major skiing facility.

Development has been blocked by a lawsuit filed by the Sierra Club. But a generally favorable environmental impact statement — foreseeing 8,000 daily visitors in winter and 6,000 in summer — was released in late February by the US Forest Service which administers the 15,600-acre area.

A bill nearly identical to Cranston's is expected to be introduced in the House in about 10 days by Rep. John Krebs, D-Fresno, who in March ended 18 months of silence and officially opposed the Disney project.

Krebs also had planned to introduce his bill Wednesday, but the House met for only 10 minutes and the measure was not ready in time.

A similar measure was introduced last year by Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez. A spokesman for Miller said he thinks the freshman lawmaker will co-sponsor Krebs bill and that this will clear the way for hearings to be held in the House, perhaps by next month.

Cranston's bill directs the Secretary of Interior within two years to develop a comprehensive management plan for Mineral King with an eye toward possible small-scale recreational facilities.

"The bill provides that there will be full public participation in the development of this management plan," he said in speech to the Senate. "Should the plan call for concessions, facilities or services, no party, including Disney Productions, would be excluded from competing for the contract."

Noting that there are 730 acres of private land within Mineral King,

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Cranston said his bill would appropriate $1.5 million to purchase all private property.

Private property owners would have their lifetime to use their property before the government took the land over. This provision would also apply to the owners of 67 summer cabins.

In his speech, Cranston said the area has potential for additional public recreation but "in the meantime (it) is not being properly managed to meet public needs and protect the area. This deterioration of the Mineral King area must cease."

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